

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1380
INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
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S E C R E T LONDON 03893

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, RH, UK
SUBJECT: OWEN MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY ON
RHODESIA

CAPETOWN FOR EMBASSY

1. EMBASSY OFFICER SAW PHILIP MANSFIELD MARCH 8 FOR BRIEFING ON FCO'S LATEST THOUGHTS ABOUT RHODESIA AND WHAT FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN MAY CONVEY TO SECRETARY VANCE DURING THEIR MEETING. MANSFIELD EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD SEEN NKOMO IN ROME LAST WEEK, PRIMARILY IN AN EFFORT TO ASSURE THE NATIONALIST THAT BRITAIN HAD NOT ABANDONED THE GENEVA CONFERENCE AND WAS WILLING TO RE-CONVENE NEGOTIATIONS ONCE A NEW FRAMEWORK HAD BEEN ESTABLISHED. NKOMO SEEMED FINALLY SATISFIED ON THIS POINT, BUT INDICATED THAT A NEW SESSION IN GENEVA WOULD IN ANY EVENT BE DIFFICULT TO ARRANGE BECAUSE OF MUZOREWA AND SITHOLE.

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2. LATER IN THE CONVERSATION, NKOMO SUGGESTED A NEW APPROACH TO A SETTLEMENT IN RHODESIA, WHICH WOULD ESSENTIALLY SKIP OVER THE GENEVA STAGE. RATHER THAN A CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS AN INTERIM STRUCTURE HE PROPOSED THE BRITISH BEGIN TO EXPLORE THE TERMS OF AN INDEPENDENCE CONSTITUTION, AND IF THIS COULD BE AGREED AMONG

THE PARTIES, THEN THE IMPORTANCE OF A TRANSITION GOVERNMENT DECREASED SIGNIFICANTLY. IF A CONSTITUTION COULD BE AGREED, NKOMO SAID, HE WOULD PERSONALLY BE WILLING TO SETTLE FOR PARITY DURING THE INTERIM PERIOD.

3. OVER THE LAST WEEK, THE FOREIGN OFFICE HAS BEEN DIGESTING AND DEBATING NKOMO'S SURPRISING COMMENTS. SOME HAVE OBJECTED THAT DISCUSSING THE CONSTITUTION WOULD IMMEDIATELY OPEN THE FRANCHISE QUESTION, AND TALKS WOULD SURELY FOUNDER. OTHERS HAVE COUNTERED THAT IF SMITH IS WILLING TO TALK OF A REFERENDUM AND IS INDEED INTERESTED IN THE EXPRESSION OF THE MODERATE AFRICAN MAJORITY, THEN HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO CONCEDE ONE MAN, ONE VOTE. ON THE QUESTION OF IRREVERSIBILITY, SOME HAVE ARGUED THAT AN AGREED CONSTITUTION WOULD DO NOTHING TO DIMINISH AFRICAN DISTRUST OF SMITH WHILE OTHERS HAVE SAID THAT A CONSTITUTION TIED TO A FIXED DATE AND WITH FRONT LINE, SOUTH AFRICAN, AND PERHAPS US-UK GUARANTEES WOULD LEAVE SMITH NO OPTIONS.

4. THE UPSHOT OF THESE DISCUSSIONS HAS BEEN A BRITISH DECISION AT LEAST TO REEXAMINE HOW BEST TO RELAUNCH A RHODESIAN INITIATIVE. THE ELEVEN PROPOSITIONS SEEM MEAGER AND SLIGHTLY OLD HAT, SAID MANSFIELD, WHILE NKOMO'S IDEA OF WORKING OUT A CONSTITUTION HAS THE ATTRACTION OF LOOKING FORWARD. MANSFIELD HASTENED TO ADD THAT, IF THE IDEA WERE EXPLORED, THERE WOULD SURELY BE NO FULL-BLOWN CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE BUT RATHER BILATERAL, "WORKING-LEVEL" DISCUSSIONS TO DRAFT A
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CONSTITUTION. IF SUCCESSFUL, THE PARTIES WOULD THEN WORK BACKWARDS TO NEGOTIATE AN INTERIM STRUCTURE.

5. MANSFIELD SAID THE FCO HAS FORMED NO FIRM OPINIONS ON NKOMO'S IDEA. HE IMPLIED, HOWEVER, THAT DAVID OWEN HAS BEEN INTRIGUED BY NKOMO'S SUGGESTION PARTLY BECAUSE OF HIS VAGUE DISSATISFACTION WITH THE ELEVEN PROPOSITIONS AND PARTLY BECAUSE THE CONSTITUTIONAL IDEA HAS MORE FLAIR. THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE US-UK CONSULTATIONS TWO WEEKS AGO ARE THEREFORE MOMENTARILY IN SUSPENSE, AND OWEN PLANS TO RAISE THESE NEW POSSIBILITIES WITH SECRETARY VANCE DURING THEIR TALKS.

MILLER

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